

Message Text

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AMCONSUL HAMBURG

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AMCONSUL STUTTGART

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BONN 06198

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, GW

SUBJECT: IMPLICATIONS OF

SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN ELECTION

REF: HAMBURG 0621

SUMMARY: THE RELATIVELY DISAPPOINTING PERFORMANCE OF THE CDU, THE STABILIZATION OF THE SPD DOWNWARD TREND AND THE STRONG SHOWING OF THE FDP IN THE APRIL 13 SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN ELECTIONS HAVE CAUSED A NUMBER OF REVERBERATIONS ON THE NATIONAL POLITICAL SCENE. MOST OBSERVERS FEEL THAT STOLTENBERG'S WEAK SHOWING HAS IRREPARABLY DAMAGED HIS CHANCES OF BEATING OUT HELMUT KOHL FOR THE CHANCELLOR CANDIDATE NOMINATION. IT ALSO APPEARS THAT THE PARTICIPATION OF FRANZ-JOSEF STRAUSS IN THE CAMPAIGN PROVED TO BE MORE A LIABILITY THAN AN ASSET FOR THE CDU.

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STRAUSS, DURING A PRIVATE CONVERSATION WITH THE AMBASSA-

DOR APRIL 16TH, ADMITTED THAT KOHL WAS LIKELY TO BE THE CHANCELLOR CANDIDATE. HOWEVER, BEFORE THIS TOOK PLACE, HE SAID, AN AGREEMENT WOULD HAVE TO BE REACHED BETWEEN THE CDU AND CSU ON POLICY AND PERSONNEL. THE NATIONAL FDP IS ELATED ABOUT THE RETURN OF THE LIBERALS TO THE KIEL LANDTAG AND THE PARTY'S VICTORY CAN BE EXPECTED TO STABILIZE THE NATIONAL FDP LEADERSHIP WHICH SHOULD HELP TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITHIN THE BONN SOCIAL/LIBERAL COALITION. THE SPD IS RELIEVED THAT THE PARTY'S DOWNWARD TREND APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN STABILIZED AND IS FEELING MORE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE NORTH-RHINE WESTPHALIA (NRW) AND SAARLAND ELECTIONS ON MAY 4. CDU LEADERS HAVE PRIVATELY EXPRESSED THEIR CONCERN THAT AN SPD/FDP COALITION COULD DEFEAT THE PRESENT CDU GOVERNMENT IN THE SAARLAND AND THUS REVERSE THE MAJORITY IN THE BUNDESRAT. ALL EYES ARE NOW TURNED TO THE MAY 4 ELECTIONS TO SEE IF THE CONSERVATIVE TREND IN THE FRG HAS BEEN REVERSED.

END SUMMARY

1. WHILE THE CDU IS PUBLICLY CLAIMING SATISFACTION WITH STOLTENBERG'S PERFORMANCE, THE RELATIVELY WEAK CDU SHOWING IN SCHLESWIG-HOLSTIN(DOWN 1.5 FROM 1971) CAME AS A SURPRISE AND SHOCK TO PARTY LEADERS. THERE IS CONCERN IN THE PARTY THAT THE CONSERVATIVE TREND HAS BEEN STOPPED AND PERHAPS EVEN REVERSED. CDU LEADERS, FOR EXAMPLE, HAVE PRIVATELY EXPRESSED THE FEAR THAT A SPD/FDP COALITION COULD UNSEAT THE CDU MAJORITY IN THE SAARLAND MAY 4 ELECTION AND THUS REVERSE THE PRESENT BALANCE IN FAVOR OF THE OPPOSITION WITHIN THE BUNDESRAT. THERE HAS ALSO BEEN A DECLINE IN UNION PARTY OPTIMISM ABOUT WINNING THE NRW ELECTION ESPECIALLY IF THE RESULTS OF THE SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN ELECTION REFLECT A GENERAL INCREASE IN VOTER CONFIDENCE ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE ECONOMY. HOWEVER, ONE HOPEFUL SIGN FOR THE CDU IS THAT IN SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN THE PARTY DID BETTER IN URBAN AREAS THAN IN THE TRADITIONALLY CONSERVATIVE RURAL AREAS. IF THIS TREND CONTINUES (AND A DECLINE IN SPD STRENGTH WITHIN THE CITIES WAS ALREADY NOTICEABLE IN THE LAST FOUR LAENDER ELECTIONS), IT NOT ONLY COULD BENEFIT THE CDU IN THE HEAVILY URBANI-

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ZED NRW BUT WOULD ALSO HAVE LONG-TERM POSITIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE PARTY GIVEN WEST GERMANY'S POPULATION DISTRIBUTION.

2. FORMER CDU NATIONAL CHAIRMAN BARZEL HAS TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT HE BELIEVED THE CDU HAD BEEN HURT BY TOO-CLOSE IDENTIFICATION WITH STRAUSS AND DREGGER. RECENTLY, HE REMARKED, CANDIDATES HAVE ONCE AGAIN BEGUN

TO APPROACH HIM FOR ADVICE. THIS IS SIGNIFICANT, HE SAID, BECAUSE IT REFLECTS THE CANDIDATES FEELING THAT THE CDU SHOULD MOVE TOWARDS A MORE CENTRIST POSITION. WHILE SOME OBSERVERS WOULD NOT AGREE WITH BARZEL THAT THE CDU IS SUFFERING FROM HAVING MOVED TOO FAR TO THE RIGHT, IT APPEARS THAT STRAUSS' CAMPAIGNING FOR STOLTENBERG CONTRIBUTED TO CDU LOSSES. THE SPD-LEANING

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"FRANKFURTER RUNDSCHAU" POINTED OUT THAT THE CDU SUFFERED THE BIGGEST LOSSES IN THE AREAS WHERE STRAUSS CAMPAIGNED.

3. EVEN BEFORE APRIL 13, HELMUT KOHL APPEARED TO HAVE A SIGNIFICANT LEAD OVER STOLTENBERG IN THE RACE FOR THE CHANCELLOR CANDIDATE NOMINATION. HIS LEAD WAS BASED ON

HIS COMMANDING POSITION AS NATIONAL CDU CHAIRMAN AND WAS REINFORCED BY THE STRONG CDU SHOWING IN THE RHEINLAND-PFALZ ELECTION. THE LOSSES OF THE CDU IN SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN, WITH STOLTENBERG AT THE HELM, WOULD NOW SEEM TO PUT THE NOMINATION OUT OF THE NORTH GERMAN'S GRASP. THIS IS BORNE OUT BY A RECENT PUBLIC OPINION POLL. REFERRING TO THE QUESTION OF CHOOSING A UNION CANDIDATE, CDU/CSU FRAKTION CHAIRMAN CARSTENS TOLD THE AMBASSADOR ON APRIL 15 THAT KOHL WAS CERTAINLY IN CONFIDENTIAL

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THE LEAD AND IT WAS HIS VIEW THAT STRAUSS WAS WITHHOLDING AN ENDORSEMENT OF KOHL (E.G., STRAUSS PUBLICLY DENIED THAT THE SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN RESULTS HAD RULED OUT STOLTENBERG AS A CANDIDATE) AS A TACTICAL MANUEVER TO ENSURE THAT HE WILL OBTAIN THE MAXIMUM CONCESSIONS FROM KOHL ON QUESTIONS OF POLICY AND PERSONNEL IN RETURN FOR HIS SUPPORT. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT STRAUSS, DESPITE RECENT SETBACKS, IS A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH IN THE CHOICE OF CDU/CSU CHANCELLOR CANDIDATE GIVEN THE BAVARIAN'S POWER BASE AS CHAIRMAN OF THE CSU.

4. DURING A LENGTHY CONVERSATION WITH THE AMBASSADOR APRIL 16TH (OTHER SUBJECTS WILL BE REPORTED IN A SEPARATE MESSAGE) FRANZ-JOSEF STRAUSS DISCUSSED THE SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN ELECTION AND THE CURRENT DOMESTIC POLITICAL SITUATION. STRAUSS REPEATED HIS DEFENSE OF STOLTENBERG'S SHOWING IN SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN BUT ADMITTED THAT KOHL APPEARED TO BE THE MOST LIKELY UNION CHANCELLOR CANDIDATE. HE WARNED, HOWEVER, THAT THIS WAS NOT AUTOMATIC AND THREE FACTS WOULD BE OPERATIVE DURING THE PERIOD AFTER THE NRW ELECTION AND BEFORE THE CDU NATIONAL CONVENTION AT THE END OF JUNE WHEN THE DECISION WOULD BE MADE. THESE FACTORS WERE: 1) DEVELOPMENT OF A PROGRAM ACCEPTABLE TO THE CSU WHICH WOULD BE ENDORSED BY THE CHANCELLOR CANDIDATE. IN THIS RESPECT IT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO CLEAR UP SOME EXISTING DIFFERENCES ABOUT SUCH ISSUES AS MITBESTIMMUNG AND VERMOEGENSBILDUNG. 2) AGREEMENT ON PERSONNEL. HE REMARKED THAT HE COULD SEE HIMSELF AS FOREIGN MINISTER BUT THAT HE FELT THAT SCHROEDER COULD NOT MAKE IT AND THAT KIEP WOULD NOT BE ACCEPTABLE. HE BELIEVED THERE WERE A NUMBER OF GOOD CANDIDATES FOR DEFENSE MINISTER AND HE THOUGHT THAT BIEDENKOPF WOULD BE A GOOD CHOICE FOR MINISTER OF ECONOMICS. THE THIRD FACTOR WOULD BE TO SEE HOW LEADERSHIP WAS EXERCISED IN THE NEGOTIATIONS ABOUT POLICY AND PERSONNEL. STRAUSS SAID THAT PERSONALLY HE LIKED KOHL AND AS A FELLOW SOUTH GERMAN FOUND HIM PERSONALLY MORE SYMPATHETIC THAN STOLTENBERG.

CARSTENS, HE SAID, WAS A "DARK HORSE" CANDIDATE.
TURNING TO THE ELECTIONS IN NRW AND IN THE SAARLAND ON
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MAY 4TH, STRAUSS SAID THAT HE DID NOT THINK THE CDU
WOULD WIN AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY IN NRW BUT THAT THE
ELECTION WOULD BE VERY CLOSE. THE MAIN PROBLEM HE
FELT WAS THAT KOEPLER WAS A WEAK CDU CANDIDATE. HE
WAS MORE OPTIMISTIC THAN CARSTENS ABOUT THE CHANCES
OF THE CDU TO HOLD ONTO THE REINS OF THE GOVERNMENT
IN THE SAARLAND.

5. THE SPD IS ENCOURAGED BY THE SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN
ELECTION RESULTS. NOT ONLY DO PARTY LEADERS BELIEVE
THAT THE VOTER TREND AGAINST THE SPD HAS BEEN STABILIZED
BUT THEY ALSO FEEL A NEW SENSE OF OPTIMISM ABOUT POSSI-
BLE GAINS IN NRW AND THE SAARLAND. ONE INDICATION OF
THE CHANCELLOR'S CONFIDENCE THAT THINGS HAVE TAKEN A
TURN FOR THE BETTER IS THAT IN NRW AND SCHLESWIG-
HOLSTEIN HE PERMITTED HIS PICTURE TO APPEAR ALONGSIDE
THE SPD TOP CANDIDATES ON ELECTION PLACARDS, SOMETHING
HE DID NOT DO IN THE HESSE OR BAVARIAN ELECTIONS. THE
UPSURGE OF SPD CONFIDENCE IS BASED ON THE ASSUMPTION
THAT PUBLIC OPTIMISM HAS INCREASED ABOUT THE FUTURE OF
THE WEST GERMAN ECONOMY (E.G., THE NRW ELECTION POSTERS
OF THE SPD NOW READ "VOTE FOR THE UPSWING"). A SECOND
FACTOR IS THAT STRAUSS, THROUGH THE SONTHOFEN
SPEECH DISCLOSURE, HAS BECOME AN ELECTION ISSUE FAVOR-
ABLE TO THE SPD AND EQUALLY IMPORTANT HAS PROVIDED A
RALLYING POINT FOR THE MANY DIVERGENT VIEWS WITHIN THE

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PARTY.

6. THE IMPRESSIVE VICTORY OF THE FDP IN SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN RESULTING IN THE PARTY'S RETURN TO THE KIEL LANDTAG HAS HELPED TO RESTORE THE SELF CONFIDENCE OF THE LIBERAL PARTY. FDP SECRETARY GENERAL BANGEMANN TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER THAT IT IS NOW POSSIBLE THAT YEAR'S END WILL SEE THE FDP REPRESENTED IN ALL TEN LAENDER LEGISLATURES. WHILE THE PARTY'S COMEBACK AFTER THE CLOSE-TO-DISASTROUS SHOWINGS IN BAVARIA AND HESSE COULD MAKE FOR A DEGREE OF COCKINESS ON THE PART OF THE JUNIOR PARTNER IN THE BONN COALITION, ON BALANCE IT IS MORE LIKELY TO HAVE A BENEFICIAL EFFECT ON RELATIONS WITHIN THE SOCIAL/LIBERAL COALITION. THE FDP LEADERS CAN NOW RELAX A BIT AND WILL NOT BE FACED WITH THE NECESSITY OF WEIGHING EVERY DECISION AS TO ITS POSSIBLE
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EFFECTS ON SPECIFIC LAENDER ELECTIONS WHERE THE FDP WAS FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL. THIS NEW STABILITY IS ALSO LIKELY TO DIMINISH THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF FLIRTING WITH THE CDU (AS WAS DONE BEFORE THE RHEINLAND-PFALZ ELECTION) AS A MEANS OF SAVING THE PARTY.

7. THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE HAS BEEN ALTERED BY THE SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN ELECTION RESULTS. NOW ALL THREE

PARTIES ARE CONCENTRATING THEIR EFFORTS ON THE MAY 4
ELECTIONS WHICH WILL INDICATE WHETHER RECENT CHANGES
WERE PECULIAR TO THE NORTHERNMOST GERMAN PROVINCE OR
IF THEY REPRESENTED AN END TO THE CONSERVATIVE TREND
AND AN IMPROVEMENT IN THE FORTUNES OF THE COALITION
PARTIES.
HILLENBRAND

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